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THE EDITOR'S DIARY.

The Lesson of Aspasia.

WE have never been able to understand why discursive communications marked "personal" or "not for publication" should be addressed to an editor; the very act is an impertinence, implying, as it does, complacent belief, on the part of the offender, in his possession of deeper knowledge or better morals or a finer spiritual quality, besides being cowardly if technically honest, or deceitful if shrouded in the ambiguity of a questionable signature. Persons who write such letters are like boys who, angered because of their expulsion from an apple-orchard, await the cover of darkness to vent their spite by hurling pebbles at the farmer's windows. Their effusions produce little effect upon the mind of even a novice and none at all upon that of one who has grown to regard, if not with disdain, at least with indifference, the immature opinions of the normally careless reader. The properly constituted and suitably trained editor, if not unduly vain, may feel measurably grateful to one who supplies him with information that otherwise he could obtain, if at all, only at great cost of time and energy; but individual views he holds lightly, even condescendingly, since already he possesses many more, such as they are, than he will ever be able to convey. But in the mind of casual quality the sense of due restraint yields readily to that of impulsive resentment, and timidity crowns the irresistible outburst with a mandate requiring concealment of identity. A letter from a woman thus afflicted with a grim determination to make known her views without accepting the responsibility for their utterance lies before us. It is marked with redundant emphasis "personal and *not* for publication"; but while, of course, we would not divulge the identity or betray the confidence of a foolish lady, even with her full permission, there seems to be no impropriety in reproducing

her sentiments behind the screen of anonymity. This, then, is what she writes in impatiently virile characters:

SIR,—I cannot let your philippic on woman go by—unrebuked.

Across the margin of my September NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW against that article I wrote:

“What this writer should do is to go back to the ancientest of ancient history, read up and acquaint himself with woman’s achievements to the present time, and see how thoroughly man is eclipsed wherever *she* has had an inning. Another suggestion is that this writer cover himself with chagrin, and pray to be stayed with charity.”

I think alongside of your remark, that “woman is a being so complex that only Divinity Himself would have had the hardihood to fetch her into existence,” you should have added the opinion of that satiric poet, Hipponax, that “a man has only two pleasant days with his wife—one when he marries her, the other when he buries her.”

I thought this number of THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW an unusually interesting one, but on nearing the end, when I found myself caught in the meshes of your article on woman, I assure you, as soon as I could extricate myself, I reverted again to my Athenian women—markedly Aspasia—as an antidote.

I feel very much like the Jew depicted in one of Hogarth’s paintings. I do not recall the name of it, but the study is of a church of olden time, when pulpits were swung up high near the rafters, and the exhortations were ranting and boisterous. A Jew with pack on back, pipe in mouth, looks in through the window as he passes, and audibly “thanks God he is not a Christian.” When I had finished your article, I thanked God not only that I was a woman, but that there are still pens wielded by Hamilton Wright Mabie, who estimate women at their true worth.

I think we women can extend you *no* absolution.

Passing gently over the pointless allusion—in rather sophomoric phrasing—to the painting, and disregarding the unintended reflection upon a distinguished *littérateur* in referring to him as a group instead of as a segregated combination of lucid mind and kindly disposition unique and incomparable, we have left for serious consideration only the striking example of woman’s supremacy thus firmly raised before our dazzled vision. Aspasia was, indeed, a genius. She was forbidden by the unique Athenian law to contract marriage with a citizen, but it would be a grave mistake to assume that she was thereby deprived of opportunities to achieve greatness. On the contrary, strange to say, her apparent disqualification was her real opportunity; for the high-born Athenian girl, seemingly more fortunate, when at length she

was wedded to a husband who had been chosen for her by old women in her early years, was by custom relegated to the attic and forbidden that association with others which is essential to the development of mind and manners. But possessing neither beauty nor certain other attributes nowadays considered essential to the maintenance of a secure position in polite society, Aspasia's wit, wisdom, tact and charm sufficed to win for her a personal influence over learned men not wielded before or since by any woman. In common with all of the stranger-women, she was free to practise arts of pleasing, and was encouraged by custom to invent new methods of feeding the vanities of men. Undoubtedly, too, in studying how best to first ensnare and then enslave, she profited from the advice of the experienced philosophers, just as the gentle Theodota was guided by Socrates himself. That her ultimate success was purely intellectual is clearly evidenced by the fact that the most scrupulous citizens brought their own wives to her for instruction; but it is unlikely that the powerful Pericles would have been driven to the extremity of tears to win her acquittal from a sympathetic tribunal if, at the beginning, at least, her life had not been as sensual as that of the majority of her class.

But does not the real question relate less to the extent of Aspasia's influence than to the good or ill wrought by its exercise? It is true that she urged the unfortunate citizen women to strive to attain a higher level by cultivating attractiveness of mind and person; but she must have realized, possibly not without gratification, that advice so sardonic necessarily, however earnest, could avail little. In point of fact, indeed, the effect produced was quite the reverse of that apparently hoped for. The citizen women were depressed and the stranger-women were exhilarated by Aspasia's success; and from the day of her ascendancy the former lost ground steadily, and the latter became more and more prominent and influential, until finally the wives were lost sight of altogether. Not one of their names appears on the pages of history from Athens's golden age to its fall, while simultaneously the records abound increasingly in mention of the "companions." Nobody ever heard of Mrs. Plato, or Mrs. Aristotle, or Mrs. Epicurus, or Mrs. Isocrates; but Archeanassa, Herpyllis, Leontium and Metaneira were names familiar to every resident of Athens. So were scores of others. One writer painted fascinating pictures of one hundred and thirty-three; the comic poets

chronicled their witty sayings and turned them into verse; sculptors, inspired by the dazzling appearance of the most beautiful woman the world has ever seen, preserved to posterity their fine features; artists, statesmen, teachers—all were at their feet.

Meanwhile, the wives remained at home caring for unloved children, and so lost to the refinements of their ancestors that before the end of the dismal story we are told that they ate like dogs, tearing away meat with their teeth and cramming it into their mouths. And yet, in theory and before the law, these neglected and degraded women continued to be responsible for the propagation of a race, while no burden rested upon the shoulders of those better equipped, but unrecognized by the State. From the downfall of the nation which inevitably ensued, are we not forced not only to conclude that the decay of Athens began with the ascendancy of Aspasia, but also to infer that no State can long survive the humiliation of one sex by the other, or even withstand the unavoidable effect of open disregard of what might be termed instinctive convention?

If so, the lesson is one well learned in these days of loosening marital ties, since it supplements that which has come to be regarded as only a moral requirement with a vitally practical reason for sturdy resistance to further encroachments upon the wholesome condition traditionally attained through matrimony.

The obviously studied, though no less thoughtless, reference of our correspondent to the "opinion of that satiric poet, Hipponax," to the effect that the only two pleasant days a man has with his wife are those of her marriage and of her burial, could find response only in the shallowest of minds. An observation based upon aught else than truth is not satirical, but silly—and such is this of Hipponax. The fact, as, of course, every one of experience well knows, is that the most trying and profanity-provoking days in a man's life are those when he marries and buries a consort. On neither occasion is he the central figure; on each he is an object of sympathy, rather than of envy; and his masculine spirit revolts against the enforcement of passivity no less than against the interruption of business. A week or so later, in both cases, he becomes reconciled, enthusiastically or decorously, as the case may be, to the requirements of fate; but for the time being he is the most wretched of beings. To offer as an authority upon a topic so vital to the human race a choleric humpback whose sole

claim to distinction rests upon his invention of a choliambic measure substituting a spondee for the final iambus in an iambic trimeter is, to our mind, absurd. A "satiric poet," forsooth, who spared neither his own parents nor the gods, who never experienced even his own vaunted gratification at either marrying or burying a wife, because he never had one! A lot he knew about it as compared with us of the present enlightened day!

On Behalf of Satan.

As we approach the season when hearts are warmed by emotions of forbearance for saints and charity for sinners, it would seem to be fitting that somebody should say a good word for the devil. We fully recognize the disfavor in which he is ostensibly and somewhat ostentatiously held by those of us who would reluctantly admit, if pressed, that we may be better than our neighbors; and we appreciate the odium likely to be incurred by one who pleads for anything like a "square deal" for a cosmic politician whose regard for righteousness suffers sadly from the nature of his business. And yet, accustomed as we are to grant that any one who has achieved noteworthy success possesses some merit, we may not logically or fairly deny the right of consideration to an archangel who, after thousands of years of strife unexampled in point of bitterness, still manages, according to current opinion, to hold his own. True, we think or, at least, are glad to hope that the seemingly everlasting struggle between day and night, light and darkness, good and evil, is gradually working to the ultimate salvation of a small, though select, segment of the human race; but, even so, to depreciate the fighting quality of our chief adversary would reflect little credit upon a breed accustomed to acclaim its own sportsmanlike spirit.

Surely, if it be true, as our most religious observers declare, that Satan still has a greater following than all of the good angels combined, the fact is full of significance. And how accounted for? That he is shrewder and more industrious than the others we have been taught and may readily believe; but even that painful admission hardly suffices as an explanation. May it not be that Satan, in common with other politicians, has been misunderstood and misrepresented? His original offense seems not to have been unduly serious; he was only so ambitious, as we are informed, that he could not keep quiet, and his restlessness

made of him a common nuisance, as it has of others since, and Saint Michael was instructed to put him out. Unfortunately for us, he landed eventually upon our earth in the vicinity of an attractive new garden, and, assuming the guise of a serpent, impertinently accosted an imprudent lady in such beguiling fashion as to produce those disastrous results of which we all are now cognizant.

It was not a manly or generous act thus to impose upon the credulity of a newly made lady quite destitute of experience; but there is no reason to believe that it was regarded as wholly without excuse even at home, because, according to the Scriptures, he kept going back and forth and handing in reports until he over-shot the mark by practically betting that poor Job could be nagged into repudiation of his faith. We have never been able to understand how Satan got permission to have that test made. Job was an inoffensive, law-abiding citizen, wholly devoted to his own sheep and wives and in all other ways exemplary in thought, expression and conduct. But, calm and simple though he seemed, he was, as we all who read the Bible know, strong enough to resist temptation, and the ambitious Satan, losing prestige in consequence in heaven, was virtually forced to pass the remainder of his days on earth, where we must confess he has been and is to this day most annoying and pertinacious.

Fortunately, there is no reason to believe that his ministrations will continue beyond this life. There was at one time such an idea shared by even such men as Milton and Dante and Calvin, but later advices indicate to the scientific mind that it was fallacious. In the first place, it is now conceded that Hell is not a hot place, but a land of bitter cold and icy walls, gloomy enough to irritate sinners, and yet not entirely devoid of material comforts. Its original name was Niflheim, but since none but Germans could pronounce it properly, it was changed as a compliment to the Teutonic goddess, Hel, when she became its queen, and has since been known to all by that title—short, easily spoken, and capable of being uttered, at times, with appropriately explosive emphasis. Thence, in midwinter, seeking shelter from the Icelandic blasts, travelled the djöful, as he was then known in that vicinity.

It was a red-letter day in Hel when the devil arrived; the jovial residents had long wanted a butt for their jests, and the

half-starved wanderer supplied the need. "In the most good-humored manner," Professor Max Müller informs us, "they exchanged a flitch of bacon for his marvellous quern; and when he had satisfied the cravings of hunger, they played many pranks upon him."

One cannot but feel some pity for the poor devil in those early days. He was young and inexperienced, lacking both patrimony and friends, and looking forward to a protracted existence and strenuous career. The Germans thought he was stupid, and their legends contain so many accounts of ludicrous ways in which they invariably outwitted him, that Southey once confessed that he "could never think of the devil without laughing." It was in this contemptuous spirit that the English, having in mind the nix or nixy of the German fairy-tales, corresponding to the nicor of Beowulf, designated him laughingly as Old Nick. But the devil was nobody's fool. Despite the loss of his quern, his indefatigability and developed talents have won for him a place in history equal, if not superior, from the view-point of mere personal achievement, to that of a mediæval conqueror or a modern President. His tragic death at the hands of a common button-moulder, as related in the legends, we must regard, not as the record of an actual happening, since we know only too well that he is still with us, but as prophetic that his career will not continue beyond this life.

Many who have had visions of hot griddles, burning oil and the like will be comforted by this assurance; and yet it is not easy to foresee how we can get along without him even in the world to come. Certain it is that those of us who have no cause for personal apprehension will not only miss the jaunty goings-on which we now find enlivening, but will also consider it almost a breach of faith to be deprived of an occasional peek at certain people we know smarting under the treatment they so richly deserve even now. We really cannot tell. It may be that the Teutonic notion is wrong, and that the good old Presbyterian conception will yet be realized. If so, how tempting the prospect of long winter evenings before the fire, listening to the sardonic prince's tales of his personal experiences among our fellow men! We can even now see Mark Twain sitting there smoking, drinking in those autobiographical reminiscences, and slowly turning green from envy. But meanwhile, possessing our souls in patience,

let us be not accused of unworthy hedging if, at this appropriate season, we ask the prayers of all good people for Satan himself, no less than for his multitudinous flock. We shall rather be bringing ourselves into healthy accord with the high sentiments of those whose sympathy finds bounds neither in race, nor in clime, nor in geographical line, nor in extra-terrestrial condition, but who desire the universal welfare—like Robert Burns, who thus exhorted his fellow-sinner to repentance:

“ But fare-you-weel, Auld Nickie-Ben!
O, wad ye tak a thought an’ men’!
Ye aiblins might—I dinna ken—
Still hae a stake:
I’m wae to think upo’ yon den,
E’en for your sake!”